

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France 1927–1961* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), xiv+294 pages.**

In *Generation Existential*, Ethan Kleinberg seeks to investigate the reception of Heidegger's philosophy in France, attempting to retrace how some of its intellectual figures have incorporated elements of his philosophy into their work. To be precise, the authors engaged are mainly Sartre, Levinas, and Blanchot, with further chapters addressing the cases of Kojève and Beaufret. (I place Kojève and Beaufret apart from the other three, as Kojève was teaching and lecturing mostly on Hegel in his famed seminar in the 1930s and only read Heidegger in order to claim that the latter was a Hegelian philosopher [!], and Beaufret was not an original philosopher in his own right, but rather the main commentator of Heidegger's work in France, albeit a highly gifted one.) The choice of these authors is not entirely justified in the book, and to some extent it represents a selective decision on the author's part, reflecting his interests and concerns. Similarly, the three "readings" or "waves" that the author identifies in the reception of Heidegger in France, without being completely arbitrary, do represent a certain interpretive understanding of the development of philosophy in France in the last sixty years that would require quite a bit of justification. A more extensive, or exhaustive, account of Heidegger's reception in France may, of course, be found in Dominique Janicaud's magisterial two-volume work *Heidegger en France* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), but Ethan Kleinberg's work remains a worthy attempt, and provides a rich and instructive narrative of certain aspects of this reception.

The author distinguishes three stages in that reception, "three readings" (17) of Heidegger's philosophy in France: the first reading explores the initial interpretations of Heidegger, an interpretation qualified as "anthropocentric, teleological, and fundamentally humanistic," focusing on Kojève and Sartre; a second reading engages Heidegger's own response to this first reading (in particular through his "Letter on Humanism") and the first occurrence of the Heidegger debate in 1946–1947 with respect to his political engagements. This second reading presents Heidegger as an "ahumanist" postsubjective philosopher" (18). The third reading explores responses to the first two readings, as exemplified in the works of both Blanchot and Levinas, with the attempt to move beyond ontology to give thought to an ethics in the wake of the Shoah.

The author begins with a narration of the contribution of a young Emmanuel Levinas, who of course was the first to introduce Heidegger's work in France. A lot of biographical information is provided on Levinas' youth and formation, with attention given to his time in Strasbourg from 1923 to 1929; his relation to the intellectual figures of that time, such as Bergson; his discovery of phenomenology; his encounter and friendship with

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Blanchot; and finally his 1928–1929 visit to Freiburg, where the young Levinas was, as it were, navigating philosophical waters between Husserl's phenomenology and Heidegger's ontological phenomenology (34). This led to the writing of *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, a reading informed by Heidegger's critiques of Husserl. Kleinberg shows with efficacy the influence of Heidegger's themes on Levinas's account of Husserl's philosophy (an influence admitted by Levinas himself), in particular with respect to his emphasis on the ontological concerns in Husserl's phenomenology. Levinas leaned towards Heidegger in this debate, just as he would lean towards Heidegger in the famed 1929 Davos debate with Cassirer. He is quoted as saying: "Cassirer was the representative of an order that had been defeated" (41.) He would come to regret this support in light of Heidegger's future involvement with the Nazi regime: "I hated myself very much during the years of Hitler for having preferred Heidegger in Davos" (42). Regarding Levinas' 1932 article "Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie," an article that was widely read and discussed in French intellectual circles, the author makes an important remark, noting that while the text presented nothing especially original and was quite faithful to Heidegger, it was nonetheless understood by its readers in light of the Cartesian model of the primacy of the subject. This in turn led to the anthropocentric misunderstanding of Heidegger by the authors of the "first reading," Kojève and Sartre.

The author has two lengthy chapters on Kojève, which might seem a bit disproportionate or excessive in terms of his real impact on Heidegger's reception in France. Kojève is of course known for his seminar given at the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes between 1933 and 1939 on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. However, the author asserts that in order to understand the reception of Heidegger in France, one needs to study Kojève as he read Hegel through Heidegger (although it is more plausible to say, as the author also admits, that Kojève read Heidegger through Hegel, that he in fact read Heidegger as a Hegelian). Long developments follow on Hegel, and on Kojève's interpretations of his philosophy in terms of a philosophical anthropology. It is in this context that the author returns to Heidegger and claims that Kojève would present his thought as a "philosophic anthropology." The author stresses that the "participants in Kojève's seminar came to understand Heidegger as a philosophical anthropologist" (83). Further, Kleinberg insists with good reason that Kojève's seminar was formative of numerous intellectual figures, including Jean Wahl, Raymond Aron, Jacques Lacan, and Merleau-Ponty.

It is with Sartre, however, that Heidegger's name became widely known and his philosophical work publicized, albeit as deformed by Sartre's (mis)appropriations. As the author states, "the popularization of Heidegger can be attributed entirely to the work of Jean-Paul Sartre" (111)—who, it should be noted, did not attend Kojève's seminar (115). Sartre reads

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Heidegger's *Dasein* as consciousness—"Sartre makes it clear that he sees no distinction between Heidegger's *Dasein* and his own understanding of human consciousness" (135)—thus missing Heidegger's entire effort to displace the self towards the event of being and to thus break with anthropocentrism. Effectively, as the author rightly notes, Sartre presents a Cartesian Heidegger (151)! However, Heidegger's own explanations in his "Letter on Humanism" on the non-subjective dimension of his thought, as well as Beaufret's growing role in Heidegger's place in France, led to a second reading that served as a corrective to the first.

In the second reading, Kleinberg notes an attempt to go beyond the boundaries of traditional French philosophy, in particular its Cartesianism and rationalism (as is exemplified in the development of Merleau-Ponty's thought). In that respect, the author explores the crucial role played by Jean Beaufret and his opposition to the "existentialist" reception of Heidegger. Apart from being the disseminator of Heidegger's ideas in France after the war, Beaufret's played an important role as a professor in forming the generations of future scholars. Even though, as Kleinberg notes, Beaufret was not an original thinker (158), his influence was decisive in the debates that would follow. Beaufret was the recipient of the "Letter on Humanism," a text that definitively broke with the Sartrean interpretation of Heidegger as a subjectivist existentialist. As the author remarks, that first reading "implied a certain allegiance to humanism, individuality, freedom, and responsibility that owed more to the legacy of the Enlightenment project than to the work of Heidegger" (183)—a claim that may well be true to some extent, but one might also suggest that the themes of freedom, individuality, and responsibility are not absent in Heidegger's work but undergo there a radical displacement and reelaboration. The decisive break was instead between a subjectivist understanding of philosophy and a thinking that attempts to overcome it, between a traditional humanism or anthropocentrism and another thought of the human displaced towards being. As Dominique Janicaud makes clear: "At the center of everything for Sartre: man; for Heidegger: being." Indeed, for Janicaud, "Sartre displays a total incomprehension [*inintelligence totale*] of Heidegger's attempt" (*Heidegger en France*, vol. 1, pp. 64, 66).

The author returns in this second reading to the "Heidegger affair"—to Sartre's initial "defense" of Heidegger's political engagement, his distinction between the thinker and the man, and his famous declaration that Heidegger the man "has no character" (170). Kleinberg shows how the attacks on Heidegger (coming from both the left and the center-right) were connected to broader attacks on existentialism. A series of articles appeared in 1946 by Maurice de Gandillac (a "visitor with some reservations"), Frédéric de Towarnicki (a "Heidegger enthusiast"), Karl Lowith (a former student of Heidegger who reworked for the occasion a 1939 essay), and in 1947 by Eric Weil (a former student of Cassirer) and Alphonse de Waelhens (a Heidegger

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commentator), followed by an exchange of letters between the two men. Lowith's essay argued for an intrinsic connection between Heidegger's philosophy and his political engagement, a claim disputed by de Waelhens. Eric Weil relied on a normative critique of Heidegger's lack of responsibility. Those various positions, the author argues, would come to define decades of debates on Heidegger's relation to the Nazis.

This question of politics led to a third moment or "reading" in Heidegger's reception in France, focusing on the event of the Shoah and its consequences for the world of thought. Such a confrontation is to be found in the work of Levinas and Blanchot, who would attempt to go beyond Heidegger towards the elaboration of an ethical thought. Both Blanchot and Levinas are presented as attempting to criticize the ontologism of prior readings, or their reliance on totality: "Blanchot and Levinas used and confronted Heidegger in an attempt to reestablish the possibility of an ethical system of thought in the aftermath of the Shoah" (245). (This claim needs to be qualified since clearly, for Levinas, it could not be a question of establishing an ethical *system*, as the model of the system participates in the same philosophy of totality that Levinas seeks to overturn.) Kleinberg shows that for Blanchot the central issue in rethinking philosophy "hinges on the issue of culpability and responsibility" (213) through a confrontation with the event of the Shoah. In relation to Heidegger, the point is made that Blanchot undertakes a confrontation with Heidegger on the issue of ethical responsibility. The assumption here is that Heidegger's thought has nothing to offer in terms of ethical responsibility, a claim that could not sustain the test of a serious reading of Heidegger's work. The author here follows Levinas, who attempted to confront ontology from the perspective of the ethical challenge of the other. The author devotes his last chapters to some readings of both thinkers through some clear and original analyses. Ironically, it is the very same author, Levinas, who had first introduced Heidegger to France in the late 1920s and led to the first reading, that is now shown to represent the eventual third wave of readings of Heidegger, a reading that attempts to move beyond Heidegger's thought. Kleinberg ends his work with a third perspective, opening onto a future of Heidegger's thought in France.

As a whole, while the book is an interesting and valuable intellectual history of the reception of Heidegger in France, the story is somewhat selective and many thinkers are regrettably left out. One thinks here of course of Merleau-Ponty, mentioned briefly in the course of the work, of Derrida, who was a major figure in the understanding of Heidegger's thought in France from the sixties on and who is strangely absent from this narrative apart from a few quick mentions, but also Lyotard, Bourdieu, Lacoue-Labarthe (on the political debate), Foucault, Nancy and so many other central French figures (for instance, the relation of Deleuze to Heidegger deserves exploration and be no doubt yield fascinating developments). As mentioned above, it is an

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intellectual history and as such displays the expected limits of such an approach in the understanding and treatment of philosophical questions. Although generally accurate and faithful, the analyses are somewhat limited in their philosophical depth, and references to the secondary literature are somewhat lacking. Many important philosophical texts, articles or books, are not mentioned or if mentioned, not engaged sufficiently. For instance, Dominique Janicaud's *incontournable* two-volume work is only briefly mentioned (in the description of Heidegger's visit to Cerisy), but not examined in any significant way. Nonetheless, Ethan Kleinberg's book makes for an interesting read, and does contribute to the question of the impact of Heidegger's thought on contemporary French philosophy.

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### **Marc Crépon, *Altérités de l'Europe* (Paris: Galilée, 2006), 205 pages.**

Marc Crépon's remarkable new geography of spirit takes on a series of major problems—political, cultural, and linguistic—and offers something of a conceptual framework and form for thinking about Europe. Some of these public engagements are, in a sense, relatively recent (the sense of European citizenship; the encompassing of national particularisms; the openness of “Europe” to other—and particularly non-Christian—countries and populations), while others are long-standing and even overwrought (the meaning of Europe after the conclusion of its colonial domination and disasters; after two World Wars and the Cold War, the legacies that Europe bears; the linguistic and cultural and political clashes that it enwraps and disguises). In eight chapters, organized around careful and motivated readings of Valéry, Adorno, Herder, Mandelstam, Patocka, and Derrida, Crépon mobilizes a conceptual and interpretive apparatus that casts Europe as a composition that exceeds local identities and identitarianisms and is instead premised on its continual self-transformation and self-differentiation thanks to both its internal and external others; on translation, obligation, and inheritance without belonging; on a recognition of the violence inherent in the history of nation and empire; and, last but not least, on a decentered notion of reason that upholds a Kantian and post-Kantian universalism and at the same time, following twentieth-century criticisms of that tradition, refuses to impose itself upon or reduce other cultures and worlds.

It is appropriate to begin by highlighting two central issues involved in reviewing this work. First, *Altérités de l'Europe* occupies an important position

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in its author's overall oeuvre. It does not merely extend his readings of the European philosophical tradition from Nietzsche through Derrida, but also offers a node from which to reorganize his earlier work. It also links certain of his principally philosophical examinations (of nationalism, language, difference, the "we," futurity, and so on) to his more political engagements, such as his *L'imposture du choc des civilisations* (2002), or his more recent call, with Bernard Stiegler, for Europeans to *Réenchanter le monde* (2006). In this sense, it forms a third node beside *Les Géographies de l'esprit* and the studies of Nietzsche, which already opened to a thinking of Europe. As I will suggest, recognizing the position of this book in Crépon's writing is important to understanding it. Second, it is necessary to clarify what this book is *not*. It is not an intellectual history of the notion of Europe, or of the transformation of Europe during a certain period. Nor is it a specific historical discussion of the emergence of ideas that would provide a certain positive imagination of Europe. Moreover, while Crépon does address several contemporary political problems—the question of Turkey (19–23), a 2005 French law on the "accomplishments of French repatriates" (24–26), the European Constitution (55), fears of a common language (47)—he is aware of the difficulty of locating his arguments in any directly political or even conceptual-political realm. As a result, the book adopts an approach whose particularity relies on an evasion of both a historicist treatment of Europe and a downright formal conception of it. What *Altérités de l'Europe* does do is offer something between a hope and a geo-philosophical program—perhaps it would be best to say that it offers a *criterion* concerning *what suffices as a political, ethical, and conceptual* treatment of Europe. To support this program, Crépon offers a certain genealogy of the past that Europe has inherited; of other pasts (internal or otherwise) it has related to; a system for its continual reformulation; and a specific engagement with the possibility of its future.

*Altérités de l'Europe* begins with a reading of Valéry's *La Crise de l'esprit* and "Mais qui est donc Européen?" which offers a first approach of European identity in terms of a *composition*. Approaching critically Valéry's iteration of the (today classic) designation of Europe as a product of Greece, Rome and Christianity, Crépon marks the significance of Valéry's treatment (and its political import today, given in particular the question of Turkey's status in the EU) by noting that Valéry does not treat these origins as belonging to, or being characteristic of, Europe. Rather, they allow for Europe's "transformation" (14), which occurs thanks to Europe's dual (and contradictory) self-formation, at once a continuous internal reorganization and an exit beyond itself—in other words, a dual engagement with itself and with its others. Crépon names each aspect of this process (as well as their overall product) a *composition* (16, 18; also 86–87). "L'Europe est le produit d'un rêve qui n'a jamais été celui d'une identité à soi ou d'un repli sur soi, mais d'une autodifférenciation, renouvelée, à chaque étape de son histoire, par la

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critique de chacune de ces deux compositions” (15). This first major definition of Europe allows for internal differentiation, a concurrent import and exchange of elements, and a disappropriation of singularist, identitarian, and exclusivist claims to cultural, linguistic, and national dominance.

Crépon moves his Europe in three principal and interwoven thematic directions: translation (16) and the “cohabitation” of languages (52); the “memory of empire” and the interaction between languages and cultures as a blend of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic mixture and loss (81-86); and the European inheritance of its history as one of appropriation, violence, and loss. This takes place in chapters 1-4, with interpretations of Adorno (on one’s own language), of Europe’s different forms of appropriation from other cultures, of Herder (on the “Old Europe” and on identity as mélange and loss), and of Mandelstam (on the nation). These interpretations double as clarifications and redraftings of the vector of Europe *qua* alterity. For example, in the case of Adorno’s 1950s texts on the subject’s relation to his or her own language (which recall Crépon’s earlier’s analysis of Kafka and especially Derrida in *Langues sans demeure* [2005]), the author seeks to establish Europe as a complex and interwoven linguistic terrain whose inhabitants construct themselves as Europeans precisely by moving between languages, establishing a mobility of idiom, and a capacity to produce meaning regardless of basic separations of borders or cultural difference (39). From the reading of Adorno and the “other love of one’s language” emerges also an image of translation as a station for the molding of European linguistic/cultural identity; in “Mémoires d’empire,” this notion of translation becomes a political argument. Centering on the different possible modes of receiving and being influenced by an ostensible “outside,” this chapter seeks to establish the dependence of Europe on what it has exploited and appropriated, and argues confidently for a distinction between exploitation, import, and translation. Translation here becomes the only ethically acceptable option, insofar as it demonstrates that “aucune culture ne s’appartient” (55) by submitting a culture to a transformation, a self-estrangement triggered by the stimulus. Similarly, the chapter on Mandelstam, centered on the problem of national exceptionalism and messianism, evokes the problematic history of nations in the twentieth century, advocating “negative determinations” (108) of Europe that would allow for a “new type of belonging” that renders national belonging obsolete (109).

The fifth chapter, which bears the book title, offers a convincing reading of Jan Patocka’s writings on Europe from the 1930s through the 1970s. Crépon’s attention to Patocka’s readings of Husserl, phenomenology, and science and technology, redeploys and reinterprets the conceptual confluence developed up to this point, showing anew how Europe makes itself into its other (“se fait l’autre d’elle-même,” 117), and pointing to dangers inherent in alternative formulations of Europe (esp. 119). In Patocka’s notion

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of Europe as a “super-civilization”, Crépon finds Europe as the vocation (118) of a universal rationality at once open to its others, as well as the bearer of a certain non-violent universalist humanism (138). Without this kind of thinking, writes Crépon echoing Patocka, rationality destroys itself (133), turns into a totalitarianism, falls to a teleological notion of science and technology (140), or otherwise fails to think the phenomenological “world” in the plural (149). Thus it ultimately fails to understand the extent to which its identity is its alterity (and vice versa). The universalized, decentered notion of reason (125, 149) instead offers precisely the crucial node around which the conceptions of inheritance, translation, and cultural mixture can come to point toward the future, toward an imaginable liberation (125) and against the loss of hope (144).

The significance and interest of Crépon’s readings should be evident by now. Crépon’s philosophical investments and political argument are interesting and refreshing for the way they direct and organize into a thinking of Europe what has taken place in the ethical, political, and religious turns of French post-phenomenological and deconstructive thought. In each chapter, Crépon argues with an eye toward shaping a historicity of Europe in terms of a memory and legacy that informs the possibility of a future for Europe; he moves from the geographical toward the play of difference, from identity to a form of continual self-transformation. In the process, he traces a hope and a responsibility (182, 194, 196-97) for the “we” Europeans can claim. With Nietzsche’s ghost and promise haunting the whole work, the futurity of this “we” is essential and consequential. How, asks Crépon, “to speak in the first person plural as citizens of Europe” (72, also 56), how to deal with the double bind of formulating an identification that is its own disidentification, and a belonging that is its own “disappropriation” (198)? It is in addressing this question that he reaches a hopeful stance for Derrida’s “perhaps, Europe” and sees his “we” as a group of wanderers among their languages’ shadows (199) seeking forever to define themselves against all logics of the proper, appropriation, and appurtenance (122-25) and to produce a culture and memory singular in its continual reinvention and intrusion upon itself. And it is this “we” that determines what I earlier referred to as the *criterion* this work seeks, that sets the task and responsibility of Europe.

I have insisted on the term “criterion” because it is in a sense the equilibrium of close reading and strategic motivation that directs Crépon’s readings and particularly the delicate development of his argument. Some readers may find the contrast of translation with import and exploitation somewhat too hopeful; others might ask to what extent certain *liens d’héritage et de mémoire* (for example Classical Greece, Christianity, or the French Revolution, to name but three, the first two of which are discussed under the headings of both Valéry and Patocka) are so central to be actually *proper* to any understanding of Europe today, particularly given Crépon’s definition.



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Still others, perhaps too indebted to a distinction between Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, might object to Crépon's choice of Herder as the thinker to support the claim that: "What [Europe] has lost: the possibility of pretending to incarnate the culture of humanity, wisdom, peace, or right, without immediately recalling its past of exploitation and devastation" (94). For the present reviewer, a more interesting question concerns Crépon's almost formalist presentation of Europe, whereby the latter comes to be identified with paradoxes and problems inherent in a notion of identity—particularly as regards an alterity that concurrently borders on becoming a positive substitute for identity while remaining its other. To what extent does Crépon offer "Europe" as a name for this notion of non-identitarian identity—a composite (86–87), a constantly self-transforming (117) identity based on a continual play with alterity? To what extent is the play of identity and alterity the *form* of the Europe Crépon wants? And where would the harmony of this identification of the two fail?

I pose these questions in light of the company that *Aliénités de l'Europe* keeps, such as Jacques Derrida's, Denis Guénoun's, and Etienne Balibar's important treatments of Europe, or, to look just a bit further, Stanley Cavell's and Richard Rorty's treatments of America. It is great company, and deserved, as Crépon's work, both in this book and in the works rethought, extended, and reorganized by this book, offers an important moment in recent thought on Europe. One wishes that Europe were not so likely to fail the responsibility, task, and hope offered here.

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